

FIDDLIN' JOHN CARSON

Complete Recorded Works
In Chronological Order

VOLUME I

c. 14 June 1923 to April 1924



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2. The Old Hen Cackled And The Rooster's
Going To Crow
3. When You And I Were Young, Maggie
4. You Will Never Miss Your Mother Until She Is Gone
5. Be Kind To A Man When He's Down
6. Billy In The Low Ground
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8. Old Sallie Goodman
9. Fare You Well Old Joe Clark
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13. Nancy Rowland
14. Tom Watson Special
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16. Dixie Boll Weevil
17. When Abraham And Isaac Rushed The Can
18. The Cat Came Back
19. I Got Mine
20. Dixie Cowboy
21. John Henry Blues
22. Arkansas Traveler
23. Old Aunt Peggy, Won't You Set 'Em Up Again?

In June of 1923, when the fifty year old Georgian Fiddlin' John Carson stepped before the recording horn on the first of numerous occasions, mass exploitation of regional American and immigrant ethnic traditional music by the major recording companies was still in its infancy. Records featuring folk music were as likely to be performed by studio musicians sight-reading from written arrangements. Texas fiddlers Henry C. Gilliland and Eck Robertson had beaten Carson onto disc by almost a year, but prior to that if you wanted a recording of, say, **Turkey In The Straw**, about the most authentic-sounding version you could hope to hear was by violinist and orchestra leader Don Richardson on Columbia.

Fiddlin' John played a significant role in rectifying that situation. Atlanta phonograph and record dealer Polk Brockman knew well of Carson's popular (though localised) reputation, one evolved over many years of street entertainment, at fiddlers contests and political rallies, and, most recently, though appearances on radio station WSB. He convinced the General Phonograph Corporation, whose flagship label Okeh was to become so important in preserving both black and white southern musical idioms, to record two songs by Fiddlin' John on one of their field trips to the south (blues singers Lucille Bogan and Fannie Goosby were also first committed to wax on this occasion). Unconvinced of his musical worth, company representative Ralph Peer was surprised when Brockman placed an order for five hundred copies, and even more amazed at the sales turnover. Less than twenty weeks later Carson was in the New York studio for an extended session that yielded at least a dozen numbers (two matrices remain untraced).

In true traditional fashion, any and all songs, tunes and stylistic influences might be accommodated and become grist to Fiddlin' John's mill. Among these were square dance tunes which had evolved from those brought over by emigrants from Britain and Ireland two centuries earlier (the Carson family claimed Irish descent), old ballads with roots in the same source, minstrel numbers, the corpus of cowboy songs which flourished briefly at the end of the nineteenth century, Tin Pan Alley numbers in popular currency during the previous three decades, and, of course, locally-produced 'ballets' which chronicled the more sensational aspects of

the news (trains wrecks, murders, violent crime), composed as recently as yesterday.

How Long Must I Wait?, that old staple of negro jug bands and songsters, is recast as political commentary in support of Tom Watson's campaign for senator. Social injustice and a plea for the old southern conservative values are highlighted in such items as **The Farmer Is The Man That Feeds Them All** and **Old And In The Way**. That poignant lament of the ranch cowhand, **When The Work's All Done This Fall** (here retitled **Dixie Cowboy**), was coupled with a lengthy version of **John Henry** on a twelve inch Okeh disc, a rare commodity indeed for such commercially marginal music at this date, and reflecting Carson's increasing importance to both the recording company itself, and to the regional ethnic market in general.

The delightful **Papa's Billy Goat** is practically a self contained mini-minstrel or medicine show skit. Before upping the tempo and launching into a handsome version of the hoedown **Sugar In The Gourd**, he laughs along with the stereotypical image of the country hick. Commenting on his hero's ill treatment by a railroad conductor Carson proclaims triumphantly:

*I'll get even with the son-of-a-gun,
I got a round trip ticket and I ain't a-comin' back...*

It's the initial seedling, on disc at any rate, of his dissolute, hard drinking, layabout, jailbird moonshiner persona that blossomed into full flower during the spoken portions of numerous later recordings.

The final coupling on this volume was the first of many releases by a loose aggregation of Carson and his musical cronies. Showcasing a twin fiddle, banjo and guitar line up that later became relatively commonplace on disc, the Virginia Reelers had beaten their more famous Georgia cohorts, Gid Tanner's Skillet Lickers, into the stores by more than two years. **Keith Chandler, August 1997**

Note: Gene Wiggins' comprehensive and highly individualist assessment of Carson, *Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy. Fiddlin' John Carson, His Real World and the World of His Songs* (1987: University of Illinois Press), cannot be recommended too highly.

FIDDLIN' JOHN CARSON: vocal with own f.*Atlanta, GA, c. June 14, 1923*

1.	The Little Old Log Cabin In The Lane	8374- -OK 4890	2:43
2.	The Old Hen Cackled And The Rooster's Going To Crow	8375- -OK 4890	2:56
No v on 6, 13; speech rather than v on 12.		<i>New York, NY, November 7-8, 1923</i>	
3.	When You And I Were Young, Maggie	72010-B-OK 40020	3:05
4.	You Will Never Miss Your Mother Until She Is Gone	72011-B-OK 4994	3:02
5.	Be Kind To A Man When He's Down	72012-A-OK 40050	3:06
6.	Billy In The Low Ground	72013-B-OK 40020	2:59
7.	Casey Jones	72014-B-OK 40038	3:04
8.	Old Sallie Goodman	72015-A-OK 40095	2:59
9.	Fare You Well Old Joe Clark	72016-B-OK 40038	3:07
10.	The Farmer Is The Man That Feeds Them All	72017-B-OK 40071	3:00
11.	Papa's Billy Goat	72018-A-OK 4994	2:54
12.	The Kickin' Mule	72021-A-OK 40071	3:05
13.	Nancy Rowland	72022-B-OK 40238	3:04
14.	Tom Watson Special	72023-B-OK 40050	3:04

NOTE: matrices 72010-12 were recorded on November 7, 72021-23 on November 8; matrices 73013-18 may have been recorded on either date.

Atlanta, GA, late March/early April 1924

15.	Old And In The Way	8603-A-OK 40181	2:52
16.	Dixie Boll Weevil	8605-B-OK 40095	2:50
17.	When Abraham And Isaac Rushed The Can	8606-A-OK 40181	2:50
18.	The Cat Came Back	8607-A-OK 40119	2:44
19.	I Got Mine	8608- -OK 40119	2:53
20.	Dixie Cowboy	8609-A-OK 7004	3:52
21.	John Henry Blues	8610-A-OK 7004	3:56

FIDDLIN' JOHN CARSON & HIS VIRGINIA REELERS: John Carson, v/f; unknown, f;
 poss. Land Norris, bj; unknown, g; no v on 22.

22.	Arkansas Traveler	8613-A-OK 40108	3:01
23.	Old Aunt Peggy, Won't You Set 'Em Up Again?	8614-A-OK 40108	2:58

Special thanks to Doug Seroff.

Original recordings from the collections of Joe Bussard, Keith Chandler, Johnny Parth, Art Satherly, Tony Russell, Karl Weiss.

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COMPACT
disc
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